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Perot: North arranged for ransom money

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WASHINGTON — Lt. Col. Oliver North arranged for Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot to put up ransom money in failed attempts to free various USA hostages, Perot said today.

North is the National Security Council staffer the White House fired after saying he'd engineered — on his own — the Iran-contra arms deals.

Perot put up money several times over the past five years, he told ABC's *Nightline*.

He did not respond directly when asked whether anyone but North knew of the ransom attempts, saying, "My sense is that the people who do these types of things are very meticulous in getting approval for their activities."

Attorney General Edwin Meese has said North was the only one who knew specifically of the arms deals.

Perot's most recent involvement: May 23, when North asked Perot to put \$2 million in a Swiss bank as part of a secret deal to free remaining USA hostages in Lebanon.

That was five days before North and ex-national security adviser Robert McFarlane made their secret trip to Iran.

The White House would neither confirm nor deny North was trying to ransom hostages when President Reagan was pledging publicly the United States would not do that.

"The NSC people say no one there knows anything about it," White House spokesman Dan Howard said Monday night.

Perot's reported attempts to help free hostages included:

■ In 1984, putting up \$2 million to try to free kidnapped CIA Beirut station chief William Buckley. "It was a very concentrated effort around Buckley... because of the position he had," Perot said.

■ In early 1982, putting up \$500,000 to try to ransom Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier, kidnapped in Italy and later rescued by Italian police.

North also asked Perot to give money to the contras, *The Washington Post* reports today, but Perot refused.

Perot — reportedly the third wealthiest person in the USA — said he'd put up ransom money again if asked: "It's the proper thing to do."